

Greater Boston¹ July 2024 Rent Survey

Summary

- **Survey respondents reported paying a median of \$2,213 for a one-bedroom and \$2,600 for a two-bedroom in Greater Boston as of July 2024.**
- **Nearly 35% of survey respondents reported being rent burdened** and spending over 30% of their gross income on rent. **A further 6% of respondents reported being severely rent burdened** and spending over 50% of their gross income on rent.

Due to flaws in this survey's design that only became apparent as people took the survey, the unreliable nature of self-reported data, and the inherent biases that come from advertising the survey only through certain social media websites, this data cannot be extrapolated to statistics about renters and rental units in the Greater Boston Area (GBA) in general. I will not provide any confidence intervals about this data. This data is meant to offer an idea of what some people are paying for rent in this area as a matter of comparison.

While I gathered all sorts of data, I am only presenting certain statistics I gathered due to some flaws in the survey's design and how I administered it. See further discussion in the section **"Flaws in Survey Design"** below. However, I have made the data from the survey available for all to examine if you would like further insight into things I didn't explore for the purposes of this report. I did not gather much demographic data besides age due to privacy concerns.

Statistics from Entire Survey

<i>Number of Valid Responses²</i>	873
<i>Percentage Living with Roommates³</i>	15.46%
<i>Percentage Paying Broker Fee for Current Lease</i>	44.90%
<i>Percentage Reporting a Rent Burden</i>	41.24%
<i>Median Rent (Roommates)</i>	\$1,185
<i>Median Rent (1 bedroom)</i>	\$2,213
<i>Median Rent (2 bedroom)</i>	\$2,600
<i>Median Rent (3 bedroom and above)</i>	\$3,000

¹ I defined "Greater Boston" for the purposes of this survey as the 101 municipalities belonging to the Metropolitan Area Planning Council's (MAPC) definition of "Greater Boston".

² See section "Data Cleaning Methodology" for a discussion on what criteria I used to determine whether to remove a response from the survey results.

³ In the survey instructions, I defined "living with roommates" as living with people who are either not one's romantic partner or part of one's family.

For towns and cities that received over 40 survey responses, I provided some statistics in the tables below:

Boston

<i>Number of Valid Responses</i>	88
<i>Percentage Living with Roommates</i>	19.32%
<i>Percentage Paying Broker Fee for Current Lease</i>	57.95%
<i>Percentage Reporting a Rent Burden</i>	40.91%
<i>Median Rent (Roommates)</i>	\$1,440
<i>Median Rent (1 bedroom)</i>	\$2,300
<i>Median Rent (2 bedroom)</i>	\$2,500
<i>Median Rent (3 bedroom and above)</i>	\$4,275

Brookline

<i>Number of Valid Responses</i>	75
<i>Percentage Living with Roommates</i>	25.33%
<i>Percentage Paying Broker Fee for Current Lease</i>	65.33%
<i>Percentage Reporting a Rent Burden</i>	46.67%
<i>Median Rent (Roommates)</i>	\$1,350
<i>Median Rent (1 bedroom)</i>	\$2,600
<i>Median Rent (2 bedroom)</i>	\$3,150
<i>Median Rent (3 bedroom and above)</i>	\$2,600

Cambridge

<i>Number of Valid Responses</i>	73
<i>Percentage Living with Roommates</i>	21.92%
<i>Percentage Paying Broker Fee for Current Lease</i>	47.95%
<i>Percentage Reporting a Rent Burden</i>	42.47%
<i>Median Rent (Roommates)</i>	\$1,313
<i>Median Rent (1 bedroom)</i>	\$2,647
<i>Median Rent (2 bedroom)</i>	\$3,000
<i>Median Rent (3 bedroom and above)</i>	\$3,850

Malden

<i>Number of Valid Responses</i>	84
<i>Percentage Living with Roommates</i>	14.29%
<i>Percentage Paying Broker Fee for Current Lease</i>	34.52%
<i>Percentage Reporting a Rent Burden</i>	40.48%
<i>Median Rent (Roommates)</i>	\$1,068
<i>Median Rent (1 bedroom)</i>	\$2,100
<i>Median Rent (2 bedroom)</i>	\$2,450
<i>Median Rent (3 bedroom and above)</i>	\$2,975

Medford

<i>Number of Valid Responses</i>	77
<i>Percentage Living with Roommates</i>	25.97%
<i>Percentage Paying Broker Fee for Current Lease</i>	53.25%
<i>Percentage Reporting a Rent Burden</i>	35.36%
<i>Median Rent (Roommates)</i>	\$1,100
<i>Median Rent (1 bedroom)</i>	\$2,050
<i>Median Rent (2 bedroom)</i>	\$2,400
<i>Median Rent (3 bedroom and above)</i>	\$2,600

Quincy

<i>Number of Valid Responses</i>	221
<i>Percentage Living with Roommates</i>	8.60%
<i>Percentage Paying Broker Fee for Current Lease</i>	33.03%
<i>Percentage Reporting a Rent Burden</i>	43.89%
<i>Median Rent (Roommates)</i>	\$1,000
<i>Median Rent (1 bedroom)</i>	\$1,990
<i>Median Rent (2 bedroom)</i>	\$2,600
<i>Median Rent (3 bedroom and above)</i>	\$2,900

Somerville

<i>Number of Valid Responses</i>	86
<i>Percentage Living with Roommates</i>	22.09%
<i>Percentage Paying Broker Fee for Current Lease</i>	56.98%
<i>Percentage Reporting a Rent Burden</i>	34.88%
<i>Median Rent (Roommates)</i>	\$1,100
<i>Median Rent (1 bedroom)</i>	\$2,400
<i>Median Rent (2 bedroom)</i>	\$2,750
<i>Median Rent (3 bedroom and above)</i>	\$3,150

Waltham

<i>Number of Valid Responses</i>	46
<i>Percentage Living with Roommates</i>	8.70%
<i>Percentage Paying Broker Fee for Current Lease</i>	41.30%
<i>Percentage Reporting a Rent Burden</i>	43.48%
<i>Median Rent (Roommates)</i>	\$1,000
<i>Median Rent (1 bedroom)</i>	\$2,075
<i>Median Rent (2 bedroom)</i>	\$2,475
<i>Median Rent (3 bedroom and above)</i>	\$2,870

Watertown

<i>Number of Valid Responses</i>	40
<i>Percentage Living with Roommates</i>	10.00%
<i>Percentage Paying Broker Fee for Current Lease</i>	57.50%
<i>Percentage Reporting a Rent Burden</i>	27.50%
<i>Median Rent (Roommates)</i>	\$932
<i>Median Rent (1 bedroom)</i>	\$2,000
<i>Median Rent (2 bedroom)</i>	\$2,400
<i>Median Rent (3 bedroom and above)</i>	\$3,200

Survey Design Methodology

The survey asks respondents eight questions and respondents have the following choices:

1. What is your age?

- a. 18-24
- b. 25-34
- c. 35-44
- d. 45-54
- e. 55+

2. Who does your household consist of?

- a. Myself only
- b. Myself and a domestic partner
- c. Myself and one or more children or other related family members
- d. Myself, a domestic partner, and one or more children or other related family members

3. Where do you live?

- a. Answers include:
 - i. All 23 of Boston's neighborhoods **and**
 - ii. The other 100 towns and cities that the Metropolitan Area Planning Council considers being part of "Greater Boston".

4. What sort of housing are you currently renting? If you live with roommates, please select "individual room" regardless of whether your place is an apartment or house.

- a. Individual Room

- b. Apartment
 - c. House
- 5. How many bedrooms does your apartment/house have, if you are renting such a place without roommates?** Please note if you are renting a studio, you have 1 bedroom.
- a. N/A - I rent a room and live with roommates.
 - b. 1
 - c. 2
 - d. 3
 - e. 4
 - f. More than 4
- 6. How much is your current monthly rent?** If you are a couple or family renting an apartment or house, please indicate what the full rent is for the entire space - not just how much you are paying after splitting the whole rent with your partner or other family members. If you rent a room with roommates, please indicate how much you are spending on your room only. Please use whole numbers only. If your rent is \$1,305.25, please put down "1305". Also, if you receive a subsidy or voucher such as Section 8, please put down the full rent before the voucher is considered. Lastly, do not include utilities or other fees in the calculation of your rent. Please include the amount you are legally obligated to pay in your contract per month only.
- a. Users input a response into the text box provided.
- 7. Did you have to pay a broker fee to move into your current living space?**
- a. Yes, for the equivalent payment of one month's rent.
 - b. Yes, though for less than one month's rent.
 - c. No.
- 8. Do you consider yourself rent burdened?** A rent burden is defined as a household spending more than 30% of their gross household income on rent. A severe rent burden is defined as a household spending more than 50% of their gross household income on rent.
- a. Yes, I consider myself rent burdened as my household spends more than 30% of gross income on rent.
 - b. Yes, I consider myself severely rent burdened as my household spends more than 50% of gross income on rent.
 - c. No, I do not consider myself rent burdened.

Data Gathering Methodology

This survey was conducted between July 10, 2024 and July 12, 2024 and was advertised to readers of the following subreddits on Reddit:

- /r/massachusetts
- /r/Somerville
- /r/bostonhousing
- /r/Waltham
- /r/Brookline
- /r/medfordma
- /r/malden
- /r/QuincyMa
- /r/newtonma

- /r/watertown

Further, the survey was also shared with the following local Discord servers:

- Boston meets Housing
- /r/Boston
- Make Friends After College MA

I did not ask respondents in the survey where they saw the survey advertised. Further, as discussed further below, I was unable to share the survey on the largest Greater Boston subreddit, /r/boston.

Flaws in Survey Design

There were flaws in the survey that only became apparent as people took the survey and gave feedback on it. Chiefly, there seemed to be confusion around Questions 4 and 5, which I admit were poorly designed questions because I was attempting to stratify the responses through a single question without considering how the questions might confuse people.

Question 2 asks about the type of household a person belongs to. Legally, households typically include family members living with a person, but for the purposes of this survey, I also considered people living with unmarried domestic partners as being part of a household together, even though that is not the strict legal definition. **However, I did not make this definition clear, and it may have caused some confusion as some people consider unmarried roommates to be part of their household and subsequently asked me why such was not an option.**

Question 4 asks what sort of housing people were renting, with only three options: 1) Individual Room, 2) Apartment, 3) House. **Here, the intention was to stratify between those living with roommates versus those renting entire houses or apartments with people considered legally part of their household, including those living with unmarried domestic partners.** However, it appears in the data that some people interpreted the question as what kind of housing unit they are living in (either an apartment or a detached house) regardless of whether they are living with roommates or not.

Question 5 asks how many rooms a renter's housing unit includes and includes an option for people living with roommates to say "N/A" as they are not renting the whole unit for themselves or with people considered part of their legal household. Again, to the detriment of this survey's design, I attempted to ask two questions in one. **I wanted to stratify between those renting a room (living with roommates) and those who are renting a whole apartment or house with members of their legal household, including those living with unmarried domestic partners.** However, it appears that some people living with roommates interpreted the question as meaning how many rooms their entire housing unit has.

Limitations of the Survey and its Data

Inherently, there are limits to how one can interpret this survey's data due to various biases. Some of the chief limitations are:

- **The data is self-reported and not verified in any way, introducing some data reliability issues.** There is no way to verify any of the data that is being inputted by survey respondents. Further, there is no control to prevent someone from taking the survey multiple times. Lastly, since it is up to the survey respondents to input their rent numbers manually, it is possible that there could be typos or data entry errors. It is also possible that some people selected the wrong option for certain survey questions than the one they intended to select.
- **The survey results have high sampling biases and various skews because it was chiefly shared on social media platforms with populations that might not be representative of the typical renter population of GBA at large.** Nearly 95% of survey respondents indicated that they were under age 45 in the survey, with nearly two-thirds of respondents saying that they were between the ages of 25 and 34. Further, given that sites like Reddit and Discord cater to people with certain socio-economic traits, it is highly likely that there are socio-economic sampling biases with the data as well, potentially resulting in more responses from certain parts of GBA and fewer in others. However, given that I did not gather any other demographic data besides age, speculation of what socio-economic biases the data may have is a matter of conjecture with data that I do not have.
- **There is undersampling of Boston residents because moderators on /r/boston would not allow the survey to be posted on that subreddit.** Not being able to post the survey on one of the largest Greater Boston communities online skewed the results towards respondents who lived outside Boston, chiefly towards communities where I was able to advertise the survey.

Data Cleaning Methodology

I took the following steps to clean up the data for interpretation and presentation.

- For those who entered a zero or a string without numbers for Question 6, their responses were eliminated from the overall analysis and considered invalid. Three survey responses were deleted for this.
- All answers in Question 6 were converted to a numerical value for analysis. As mentioned in the “Limitations” section, it is possible that there are widespread data reliability issues due to self-reporting. **In my review of the data, I noted a few potential outliers.** However, without the ability to confirm with those respondents whether these outliers were the result of typos or some other data entry error, **I took these potential outliers at face value and included them in the overall analysis**, as they did not seem to be what I consider out of the ordinary (e.g., no one put down that they were paying \$100,000 a month in rent, though it is possible). One person put “6” as a response to Question 6, which I deleted because no one pays \$6 a month for rent and is a clear outlier.
- Due to confusion over Questions 4 and 5, **I considered anyone who put down either “Individual Room” for Question 4 or “N/A - I rent a room and live with roommates” for Question 5 as living with roommates** and took the rent amount the respondent provided in Question 6 as if they were paying for a single room. I did not attempt to guess how the respondent interpreted these questions based on the number they provided, but I assume if they selected either renting a room or say they live with roommates that they indeed live with roommates.
- A handful of respondents who said they lived with roommates answered with the rent

amount they pay as well as the rent for the entire housing unit they share with their roommates. For the purposes of data cleaning, I presented those responses as if they were reporting how much rent they pay for their room only.

Considerations for Future Surveys

In future renditions of this survey (if there are any), I will be making the following changes:

- **Eliminate or simplify questions about what kind of people renters are living with, such as Question 2, Question 4, and Question 5.** Whether a renter lives with their domestic partner or a roommate is irrelevant. What is more relevant is the number of bedrooms a housing unit has, and how much everyone living there pays for the entire unit.
- **Ask people how long they have been living in their housing unit and what percentage their rent increased by between their current lease and their previous one.** The survey results suggests that there are some people with sweetheart deals because they are potentially long-lived tenants, but this is impossible to determine without further data.
- **Consider asking if people are performing labor of some kind in return for reduced rent.** See point made above.
- **Consider asking a question to stratify those who are still living with family or don't pay rent as part of their employment.** A few respondents indicated that they pay nothing (\$0) in rent. For the purposes of this survey, I did not consider such answers as I am looking for people paying rent. Presumably this is because these respondents are young adults living with family. **However, it might be possible to incorporate such responses in a future survey with the right questions and it would be useful to see how many people are shut out of the rental market and reliant on housing from family to live in the area.** Such a question can be as simple as "Do you pay rent currently?" **Further, another consideration to capture full rent amounts is to ask respondents not to consider any rent payments made on their behalf from others (e.g., parents) in calculating how much rent they pay.**
- **Consider asking questions about amenities, such as if the housing unit has in-unit laundry, central air-conditioning, etc.** More convenient amenities are a driver of higher rent prices and can explain why rent is higher for some people but not others. They also serve as a proxy for determining if a respondent is living in newer housing stock or older housing stock.
- **Consider asking if the respondent is receiving any kind of government subsidy for their rent (such as a Section 8 voucher) or live in government housing.** Questions about subsidies can reveal why rents appear lower for some respondents and not others.
- **Figure out a way to advertise the survey to Boston renters.**
- **Consider asking when someone first started renting their unit and how much rent increased compared to last year on a percentage basis.**

Conclusions

Renting in Boston is expensive as this survey makes quite clear despite its limitations. Nearly 41% of respondents consider themselves rent burdened.

I would like to thank those people who took the survey. Without you, there would be no data.